



# Farm Notes<sub>12</sub>

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## SOLUTIONS

## Beef Management - Weaning

Issue #12 by Tim Wilson, Bradford County Extension

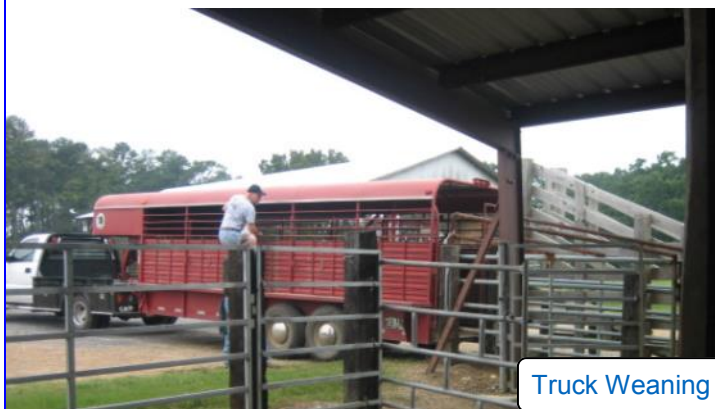
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### Beef Management - Weaning

Weaning is one of the most important but stressful events calves undergo before slaughter and can result in reduced gains, increased sickness and even death. There are several methods of weaning; some involve transitional separation while others are abrupt and immediate. Each method has arguable advantages and disadvantages and all should be taken into consideration when comparing which strategy is the right fit for an operation.

#### Truck Weaning

Some producers will wean calves and send them directly to market. This type of weaning, sometimes called "truck" weaning, requires very little labor or facilities, and is extremely stressful to the calves (J. B. Hall, Virginia Tech). These calves are more likely to become sick during the next stage of development due to this type of weaning. Producers who wish to reduce sickness may consider an alternative method such as those described below.



Truck Weaning

#### Dry-lot Weaning

Dry-lot weaning involves separating calves from their dams and containing them in a dry-lot with feed bunks and water. Feed bunks should be placed perpendicular to the fence or hay bales



Dry-lot Weaning

should be positioned to prevent calves from walking the fence line in search of its dam. Allowing a water trough to overflow is useful for calves that may not be familiar with drinking from a trough. Facilities for dry-lot weaning must be sturdy to prevent calves from escaping. The abrupt separation of the calf from its dam is stressful; however, compared to truck weaning, the stresses related to transportation and marketing are eliminated.

### Pasture Weaning

Pasture weaning is similar to dry-lot weaning in that calves are separated from their dams, but rather than being placed in a dry-lot, they are



Pasture Weaning

maintained on familiar pasture (J.B. Hall, Virginia Tech). These calves should be located a considerable distance from the cowherd to prevent a cow or calf from tearing through fence lines to reach each other. If facility fences are not in good shape, this method of weaning may be more practical than weaning in a dry-lot. As with dry-lot weaning, stresses related to the abrupt separation are still present, but is still reduced compared to truck weaning.

### Fence-line Weaning

A method of weaning that is gaining in popularity is fence-line weaning. This method involves separating calves from their dams by a common fence line. Producers who utilize fence-line weaning must make sure that fences are secure and sturdy to prevent cows and calves from mixing. Cows and calves will migrate into the field to graze, but will return and spend time along the fence line. Although behavioral changes occur as weaning takes place, researchers from The University of California, Davis report that after the 5th day of separation, calves returned to normal

behavior. When compared to weaned calves that were totally separated, this research reports that fence-line weaned calves gained more weight 2 weeks after weaning. These researchers noted that although the difference in weight gain at 10 weeks was less than at 2 weeks, these calves continued to gain more weight than totally separated weaned calves. These researchers also report that fence-line weaned calves did not gain as much weight as un-weaned controlled calves; however, they did gain more than totally separated weaned calves throughout their experiment. Selecting a weaning method that best suits your operation will be useful when trying to maximize production.

Regardless which weaning strategy is used, developing an understanding of how stress can play a role in weight loss and sickness will be useful when making sound management decisions.